

## Chapter 3 : Statement of Engagement

3.1 This chapter outlines the steps the Council has taken to consult and engage throughout the production of the Evidence Report by following the Scottish Government's [Effective Community Engagement in Local Development Planning Guidance](#). [Section 16A](#) and [section 16B](#) (2) and (4) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 set out the minimum legal requirements for people and organisations to engage with and outline that input from the following groups should be sought in producing the Evidence Report:

- **The Public**
- **Children and Young People**
- **Disabled People**
- **Gypsy Travellers**
- **Key Agencies**
- **Other Stakeholders/Specialist Groups**
- **Community Councils**

3.2 The following sections within this chapter outline how specific efforts were made to fulfil these requirements as defined in the Act.

### **The Public**

3.3 The Council led opportunities for public engagement with the HLDP Evidence Report and communicated these through the Council's [HLDP webpages](#), the [Highland Development Plans Online Portal](#), and the [Development Plan Scheme](#). These opportunities were both general (relating to all LDP policy areas) and focussed (relating to specific LDP policy areas) in nature as set out below:

### **HLDP Evidence Consultation**

3.4 The HLDP Evidence Consultation which ran from 31 January to 2 May 2025 was a dedicated public consultation that presented early drafts of the evidence presented within this evidence report on the [Highland Development Plans Online Portal](#). It was a general consultation inviting engagement on all LDP policy areas. It also signalled areas of evidence gaps and provided opportunities for respondents to make the Council aware of further evidence and additionally sought views on what respondents thought of our evidence and the early conclusions we could draw from this. This was promoted widely using the Council's official communications channels, and was circulated to community groups and community councils, Councillors, Key Agencies, neighbouring local authorities, the development industry, and to a wide range of subscribers who

have opted to receive such updates specific to development planning in the Highlands.

- 3.5 In some instances, respondents opted to upload their comments to the HLDP Evidence Consultation rather than by directly inputting this to the platform. In any event, both uploaded submissions and comments provided directly within the platform were considered.
- 3.6 A total of 286 comments were received from 68 respondents, which included members of the public, alongside key agencies, the development industry, community councils and interest groups among others. The Council compiled all feedback and in many instances was directed towards additional sources of information which was duly considered. The feedback from the HLDP Evidence Consultation is available within a compiled HLDP Evidence Consultation Report **(THC006)** and highlighted significant crossovers between policy areas. In contrast to the structure within the HLDP Evidence Consultation, the evidence as presented within the Evidence Report was thus restructured on the basis of this consultation to best collate related policy areas in an appropriate manner to avoid duplication and repetition.
- 3.7 There were also several in-person drop-in events held around Highland jointly with colleagues leading on Area Place Planning and on the Highland Investment Plan. This provided opportunity not only to raise awareness of the HLDP but also to explain the relationship between different plans and programmes.

### **Place Standard Tool**

- 3.8 The Council's Place Standard Tool Consultation from 17 June to 16 August 2024 was an online public engagement opportunity that related specifically to the [Place Standard Tool](#) which is designed to support communities, public, private and third sector organisations to assess the quality of a place and to support the consideration of development planning and design within the framework of the 14 Place Standard themes and to deliver on the [Six Qualities of Successful Places](#) which are detailed further in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**. High Life Highland additionally undertook specific Place Standard Engagement using bespoke materials for Children **(THC176)** and Young People **(THC177)**. The full breakdown of consultation feedback received within this is detailed in **THC175**. The Place Standard Tool could be completed by individuals and by groups. There were 990 responses, in addition to which young people were engaged through sessions facilitated by High Life Highland. High Life Highland is a charity, established by the Council in 2011 to deliver leisure services and community learning on its behalf. It delivers and supports adult learning, arts, leisure centres, libraries, museums, outdoor education, sport and youth work.

### **Local Living**

- 3.9 The Council's Local Living Consultation from 17 June to 16 August 2024 was an online public engagement opportunity that related specifically to the Council's [Local Living Interactive Map](#) and the methodology behind it, which was developed in response to NPF4 Policy 15 as detailed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**. This was hosted on the [Highland Development Plans Online Portal](#) alongside the [Local Living Mapping Technical Note](#) to provide further context behind the development of the tool.
- 3.10 The consultation generated 27 responses with a total of 46 comments and were received from a range of parties, including individuals, community councils and community development organisations. A summary of the responses received, including the Council's consideration is shown in Local Living in Highland Consultation Report (**THC168**).

### **Housing Need and Demand Assessment**

- 3.11 The HLDP Evidence Report was developed in tandem with a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA), led by Arneil Johnston which is discussed further in **Chapter 9: Housing**. The HNDA was supplemented by primary research among Highland's communities to ensure that any gaps in secondary datasets could be addressed, particularly for informal housing arrangements, overcrowding, concealed households or localised affordability pressures. The primary research undertaken was the Highland HNDA Survey, which was led by Research Resource and undertaken in two stages from September to November 2025 over a ten-week period.
- 3.12 The first stage involved 850 telephone interviews with households living across the Highland Region. Households were randomly selected to take part by the Council and received a letter from Highland Council confirming this. Selected households were then contacted by Research Resource by telephone, unless they opted out of the survey process.
- 3.13 The second stage involved an online survey open to all residents in Highland aged over 16 who are main householders. The survey was promoted on social media by the Council, local organisations such as Community Councils and local employers.

### **Call for Development Sites**

- 3.14 While not strictly part of the Evidence Report, the Council prepared for a Call for Development Sites in tandem with progression of the Evidence Report. Undertaking this step earlier in the progress was considered to be more suitable for the Highland context as it:

- Enabled the Council to identify the land being promoted for development within a large expansive area,
- Informed concurrent work to assess and progress suitable candidate Masterplan Consent Area (MCA) sites,
- Guided and informed engagement with infrastructure providers on deliverability and constraints
- Captured opportunities in smaller or rural settlements that don't always show up clearly in strategic data

3.15 A public consultation on the Call for Development Sites Draft Submission Template between 28 November 2024 and 3 January 2025 which prompted 25 responses principally from the development industry and was amended in light of these comments and made available as part of the Call for Development Sites between January and May 2025.

### **Children and Young People**

3.16 The Council has engaged with Children and Young People using opportunities for general and focussed engagement on specific policy areas.

3.17 The Council ran a stall with engagement activities at the Highland Youth Parliament Conference held in June 2024, promoting to delegates the role of planning, evidence gathering for the HLDP and specifically the then live Place Standard Tool and Local Living Consultation as ways to get involved.

### **Place Standard Tool**

3.18 In addition to the Place Standard Tool consultation undertaken with the wider public, High Life Highland additionally undertook specific Place Standard Engagement using bespoke materials for Children (**THC176**) and Young People (**THC177**). The full breakdown of consultation feedback received within this is detailed in **THC175**. Over 470 young people were engaged within group sessions and those group's views captured in the tool.

### **Play Sufficiency Assessment**

3.19 The Council's Playpark Strategy and Action Plan (**THC233**) discussed further in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** was underpinned by consultations and surveys with children, disability groups, NHS and the third sector. The Council's primary engagement activity for this work included the Let's Talk about Play Parks survey which was designed for all age groups to be able to complete, as they were able to and received 1,151 responses, half of which were from primary school aged children. The full

approach undertaken for this exercise and the findings from the engagement is detailed within the [Playpark Strategy and Action Plan Appendix 1](#). The findings of these surveys later informed the development of the playpark assessment scoring methodology within the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA), by reflecting what was important to respondents.

- 3.20 The draft PSA Report and Maps were published for public consultation between 16 January and 27 February 2026, alongside a targeted consultation focusing on play spaces that had received recent investment. This consultation concentrated on the 45 play spaces that had received investment since they were surveyed for the PSA, engaging 41 primary and 26 secondary schools whose catchment areas those play spaces are located within.
- 3.21 The consultation for the general public and organisations received 34 responses which included responses from Community Councils, Individuals, Councillors, Residential Associations, the consultation with school pupils received 100 responses (with one or more individual pupils (total 65) or pupil groups (total 35) from each of 17 schools which responded). In addition, 17 queries and/or comments on the Draft PSA were received by email, in addition to which, a range of questions were received about the PSA consultation
- 3.22 A summary of consultation responses is included within Appendix 1 to the Play Sufficiency Assessment – Consultation Outcomes report. Following the consultation, feedback was reviewed alongside factual updates and corrections, and where appropriate, changes were made to the PSA report and mapping. The PSA has now been finalised and is presented to the [Economy and Infrastructure Committee \(28 May 2026\)](#) for approval.

### **Housing Need and Demand Assessment**

- 3.23 The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) were part of the Council's Housing Market Partnership, a stakeholder group with key input in overseeing the development of the HNDA. UHI promoted the Highland HNDA Survey among their students to increase engagement among this demographic.

### **Disabled People**

- 3.24 The Council's equalities officer liaised and provided contact details for a range of Highland equalities and disability groups which included children's disability services. These contacts were alerted to the HLDP Evidence Consultation and those who responded are shown in the HLDP Evidence Consultation Report **(THC006)**.

- 3.25 The HNDA estimates need and demand for specialist housing provision for disabled people is a required component in consideration. The Council's appointed consultant Arneil Johnston was provided with all records of quantitative evidence, and was introduced to other Council services, the HSCP and relevant officials within NHS Highland who provided further empirical, anecdotal and qualitative evidence related to disabled housing need and demand, including adaptations and in-situ solutions across the Highlands. The NHS and HSCP promoted the primary research among equalities and disability groups to widen participation and inform local evidence on existing need in Highland.
- 3.26 The primary research undertaken to support the HNDA also contained specific survey questions regarding specialist housing provision and was circulated among third sector organisations to increase outreach to those with disabilities.

### Gypsy Travellers

- 3.27 Planning Officers liaised with other Council Services with inter-related remits for Gypsy/Travellers, including the housing service and NHS Highland, and sought input on how best to engage with the Gypsy/Traveller community. Officers were made aware of a Gypsy/Traveller community newsletter in circulation and provided input so that contact was included within several editions introducing the HLDP, and how to contact the Council regarding this to participate.
- 3.28 The Bingen Noggins Tobar Taking our Journey Project Impact Report led by Progress in Dialogue sets out the findings of ongoing engagement with the Gypsy/Traveller community in the Highlands. The project is a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project funded by the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, designed to explore the root causes of mental health challenges and substance use among Gypsy/Traveller communities in the Highland region. The key findings of this are contained within **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**. Over the course of the project, project partners carried out; community visits, household conversations, storytelling sessions, and knowledge exchanges, shaped by the leadership of Gypsy/Traveller Community Champions. In total, more than 60 community members informed the process, surfacing stories, experiences, and insights rarely included in mainstream mental health or addiction strategies. This research was focused on Gypsy/Travellers in housing in rural areas such as Caithness, Sutherland and Cape Wrath, in addition to communities living on Gypsy/Traveller sites, both private and Council-owned.
- 3.29 As the HLDP Evidence Report has been prepared in tandem with the HNDA, estimating need and demand for housing among the Gypsy/Traveller community is a required component in consideration as detailed in Chapter 9: Housing. The

Council's appointed consultant was provided with all records of quantitative evidence, and was introduced to other Council services who provided anecdotal and qualitative evidence from the various Gypsy/Traveller sites across the Highlands. These Council services additionally promoted the primary research among Highland's Gypsy/Travellers to widen participation and inform local evidence on existing need in Highland

- 3.30 The Council and Arneil Johnston additionally met with Mecopp and Progress in Dialogue to discuss best approaches for further engagement opportunities and to address gypsy/traveller considerations within the HNDA. The content related to Gypsy/Travellers within **Chapter 9: Housing** was informed by the matters raised in these discussions. A record of all meetings is provided within the Log of Engagement (**THC001**).

### **Key Agencies**

- 3.31 The Council has engaged with Key Agencies as defined by [Reg 25 of The Town and Country Planning \(Development Planning\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2023](#) in a number of ways.

### **Key Agencies Group (KAG)**

- 3.32 In February 2023, the Key Agencies Group (KAG) invited expressions of interest for planning authorities interested in working with the group to pilot a collective place-based approach as part of development plan preparations in 2023-2024. The Highland Council was one of 22 planning authorities that expressed interest. Following KAG consideration, on 24 May 2023 it was announced that pilot work would be taken forward with six planning authorities, including Highland. The Key Agencies provided input through a number of meetings and workshops to support place-based approaches to key stages of evidence gathering analysis and reporting. Representatives from KAG and from the Council held the first joint workshop on 13 July 2023. A record of all KAG meetings is provided within the Log of Engagement (**THC001**).

### **Other Key Agency Involvement**

- 3.33 Key Agencies were alerted to the HLDP Evidence Consultation and those who responded are shown in the HLDP Evidence Consultation Report (**THC006**). Key agencies represented a significant share of feedback received within the HLDP Evidence Consultation, and their feedback was incorporated within the drafting of the HLDP Evidence Report. In some instances, further meetings were arranged

with specific Key Agencies to clarify or discuss matters before proceeding, as noted within the Log of Engagement **(THC001)**.

- 3.34 Key Agencies were emailed consultation draft copies of HLDP Evidence Report Chapters throughout 2025 and invited to provide further comments on the sufficiency of the evidence and the extent to which their views had been taken into consideration. Dates of circulation are noted within the Log of Engagement **(THC001)** and their submissions to these iterations have been denoted with appropriate corresponding reference numbers. As other Evidence Report Gate Check outcomes have indicated that information should as far as possible be presented within the body of the evidence report itself, the views expressed by Key Agencies alongside the Council's consideration of them are summarised within the Summary of Stakeholder Engagement sections of the respective chapters throughout the Evidence Report.
- 3.35 Where applicable, the respective chapters indicate which Key Agencies have indicated that they consider our evidence to be sufficient for their purposes.

### Other Stakeholders/Specialist Groups

- 3.36 Alongside Key Agencies, other stakeholders have a valuable role to play in delivering the HLDP, and have therefore informed the Evidence Report. The HLDP Evidence Consultation was promoted by email correspondence to other stakeholders such as the development industry and renewables industry, third sector organisations and a wide range of subscribers who have opted to receive such updates specific to development planning in the Highlands, and feedback received is provided within HLDP Evidence Consultation Report **(THC006)**.
- 3.37 In the preparation of the Evidence Report, the Council has specifically engaged with industry bodies holding relevant expertise on specific subject matters, where it was considered that no recent, Highland-specific evidence existed that reflected the scale of activity ongoing, the needs of the industries and future directions of travel. This includes:
- **Economic and Employment Projections:** the HNDA Housing Market Partnership consisted of a steering group to oversee the HNDA housing need projections and the economic and employment drivers of these. This included key industries in the Highland economy with specific workforce and student accommodation needs, such as SSEN-T, SSEN-D, NHS Highland, ICFGF, alongside Chambers of Commerce, and other coordinating agencies who directly lead on this remit such as HIE. Stakeholders attended a series of online workshops to inform this process.
  - **Aquaculture Industry:** tailored online and survey engagement was carried out between the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2025 and 30<sup>th</sup> June with 14 representatives from

the aquaculture industry comprising finfish, shellfish and seaweed harvesting sectors. Of these, 10 responded with their comments and views. Further details of this engagement are provided in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**.

- **Ports and Harbours:** tailored online and survey engagement was carried out with 27 ports and harbour authorities and ran from the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2025 to the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2025. Of these, 9 responded with their comments and views. Further details of this engagement are provided in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**.
- **Minerals Audit:** Operators of 35 known operational quarries identified from planning records were invited to complete the Minerals Audit Survey for a period of 6 weeks from mid-May until the end of July 2025. Results received for 12 sites provide a more informed response to NPF4's requirements regarding aggregate landbanks as outlined in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**.
- **Culture and Creativity:** tailored online and survey engagement was carried out from 5<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October with 75 galleries and museums across the region. Seven responses were received, providing comments, views and insights into future requirements. We are also engaged with 400 community halls in the same format, that support culture and creativity across the region, with this consultation scheduled to close on the 21<sup>st</sup> November. Further details of this engagement are provided in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**.

## Community Councils

3.38 There are 158 Community Council areas within the Highland Council area (a small number – around 12 – of which are wholly or partly within the Cairngorms National Park). At any one point in time many of the areas (but typically not all) have a Community Council formed - and amongst Community Councils, the level of activity varies between them. Both the Place Standard Tool and the Local Living consultation were promoted to Community Councils. Community Councils were also alerted to the HLDP Evidence Consultation, an online briefing was held for them and those who responded to the consultation are shown in the HLDP Evidence Consultation Report (**THC006**). However, the primary mechanism for formal consideration of Community Council input to the HLDP Evidence Report was through the incorporation of Local Place Plans.

### Local Place Plans

- 3.39 Local Place Plans (LPPs) are community-led plans setting out proposals for the development and use of land. Introduced by the [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#), and directed by the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Place Plans\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2021](#) which came into force on 22 January 2022, an LPP is for a community to set out its aspirations for its future development. Once completed and then registered by the planning authority, they are to be taken into account in the preparation of the relevant local development plan.
- 3.40 [Section 15A of the Town and Country Planning \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#) (as amended), requires planning authorities, before preparing a LDP, to publish an invitation to local communities to prepare LPPs, and to publish information on the manner in which and date by which such LPPs are to be prepared in order to be taken into account in the preparation of the LDP and the assistance available for local communities to prepare LPPs. The Council began promoting the Local Place Planning opportunity as a soft launch during 2022, with its dedicated [LPP webpages](#) being launched on 29 December 2022, for which resources and templates have been progressively developed and added in order to inform Community Councils and Community-Controlled Bodies on the process and requirements for registered, valid LPPs. Once NPF4 had been adopted and published in February 2023, The Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 had come into force on 19 May 2023 and the Local Development Planning Guidance was published on 24 May 2023, the requirements and timescales for new-style LDPs was clearer and the new provisions were commenced. This enabled the Council to publish on 30 June 2023 its formal invitation to local communities to prepare LPPs. A dedicated workstream to assist communities and register LPPs also commenced at this time.
- 3.41 There are now [22 registered LPPs](#) for Highland (all registered before 1<sup>st</sup> May 2026), a further 13 which have been formally submitted but are not yet registered and another 39 are understood to be in preparation. Each relevant Evidence Report chapter summarises the issues raised by local communities in each registered LPP. It is the Council's intention that LPPs that become registered between 1<sup>st</sup> May 2026 and the date on which the Evidence Report passes the Gate Check will also be taken into account in the preparation of this HLDP from the outset. LPPs that are registered after the date on which the Evidence Report passes Gate Check will be taken into account at the next available opportunity in the local development plan cycle, which may include some consideration in the preparation of this HLDP.
- 3.42 LPP preparation involves the community body engaging with the community as well as a minimum 28 days' consultation with the relevant Councillors serving the area and Community Councils within or adjoining the area. The Council therefore

recognises that LPP activity demonstrates further engagement with the public at large within the relevant areas.

*Table 3:1 Highland Local Place Plans*

Registered LPPs	Submitted LPPs	In Preparation LPPs
Ardgour	Balloch	Alness
Black Isle	Contin	Applecross
Broadford and Strath	Dunnet and Canisbay	Ardross
Caol	Edderton	Assynt
Croy and Tornagrain	Helmsdale and District	Beauly
Dores and Essich	Kinlochbervie	Bettyhill, Altnaharra and Strathnaver
Duror and Kentallen	Lairg	Brora
Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston	Rogart	Dornoch and Area
Gairloch	Strathpeffer and District	Durness
Garve and District	Tongue, Melness and Skerry	Holm
Glen Urquhart	Wester Loch Ewe	Isle of Rum
Golspie		Kiltearn
Kinlochleven		Kirkhill and Bunchrew
Kyle of Sutherland		Melvich
Lochalsh		Scourie
Morvern		South Knoydart
Nairnshire		Strathdearn
Sleat		Strathglass
Stratherrick and Foyers		Strathnairn
Torridon and Kinlochewe		Tain
		Thurso
		Uig
		Wick